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Reviews are welcome from readers but please check first to make sure
nobody else has sent in a review of the same game.

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Editorial

Welcome to Volume II Issue 2 of 'Probe'.

Firstly, my sincere apologies to everyone who has been kept waiting for replies to letters. I haven't had time to turn around over the last month, my husband had to keep reminding me to breathe!

I'm afraid it doesn't look as if the situation is going to improve over the next few months so I would prefer if you telephoned with queries or you could be kept waiting far longer than is usual for a reply. Apart from the Saturday and Sunday times which are shown at the back of the magazine you could take pot luck and telephone Monday to Friday between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. when you're most likely to catch me at home. Somebody has to do the shopping, collect the kids from school and take them to the dentist etc., and it's usually muggins here that has to do it, so I can't guarantee to be there.

John Barnsley is taking over as Editor of 'Soothsayer' from the March issue to give me more time to deal with 'Probe'. Thanks for stepping in John I'm sure you'll do a great job. However, John will no longer have time to send in 'J. R.'s Pages' so I will need contributions for the various sections: Hints, Objects and Their Uses, Precision Corner, Getting You Started, One page maps. We also seem to have a dearth of games to review for machines other than Spectrum, so if you fancy writing a review then get in touch just to make sure that no-one else has offered to do the same game. When you do send in reviews then please try to list all the machines that the game is available for.

Those of you who have dealt with Alex Aird in the past will be pleased to learn that he has opened up a new shop and can be contacted by telephone during office hours. The new address and phone number are as follows: Tel: 021 770 0468
         Aird Services, The Computer Store, Unit 82 In Shops,
 Chelmsley Wood Shopping Centre, Chelmsley Wood, Birmingham. B37 5TL

Hope you enjoy this issue of 'Probe' and see you all next month.

                              Sandra
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CODED MESSAGES
by Mandy Rodrigues

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I don't know how other readers feel about coded messages but I for
one absolutely love them! I can happily spend hours with a pen and
paper trying various ways of cracking them. More and more programmers
are including coded messages into their adventures these days and I
think a little more attention to this subject is necessary.

The more usual type of code is a simple substitution of letters i.e.
ZOPQX = DELTA. There is sometimes an added twist in that the message,
once decoded, must be read backwards to make sense. If a code uses
strange runes or symbols then the player will usually find a strong
clue to the decoding somewhere in the adventure to help him on his
way.

When confronted by a coded message I have now worked out a system to
get me started and I would like to share it with you. If readers have
any other useful systems for cracking codes I hope they will send
them in to Probe so that we can get cracking (sorry!) on our unsolved
codes.

When I first examine a coded letter or message I always begin by
checking which of the letters is repeated most. It is a fact that the
letter 'E' is the most used in the English language and so it stands
to reason that if a letter keeps cropping up then I will try to
substitute 'E' first.

I also look out for any words of fifteen letters as this could well
indicate the word "Congratulations". I also check to see if there is
an eleven letter word followed by a two letter word as this might
mean "Combination is". Similarly a four letter word at the start with
no repeated letters could be "Dear" especially if it is a letter. I
have even come across "To whom it may concern" which is also quite
easy to spot.

Look for single letters set on their own as this is usually 'I' or
'a' and three letter words, especially if they are repeated, could
well indicate "the" or "and".

Once you have got two or three letters decoded you will see that some
words are recognisable and from then on it is plain sailing.

Other types of code can include repeated letters in words i.e. "Soon
popped free canon did Boom Boom roar" which if you take only the
repeated letters in each word, translates simply as Open Door.
Another type of code could be along similar lines but with the ending
and beginning of letters giving the clue as in "Go outstrip Pete even
now we excell Lovel Lawson" which means of course 'Open well'.

Thankfully, because of the amount of words required in the above they
are not used too often because of the memory used up.

Some coded messages can be quite obvious but so easily missed such as
the one in the Bomb Shelter in Hollywood Hi-Jinks. On the safe is a
plaque which reads "Levy, Regan, Lebling - Safe Company, Upper
Sandusky, Ohio. 1936". I confess that I spent so much time trying to
crack the code by a substitution of letters that I completely missed
the clue altogether. By the time I had finished I could have compiled
a dictionary with the hundreds of words I had made from that short
sentence. I could have kicked myself when it finally hit me. The
words Levy, Regan, Lebling were the only ones I needed. Levy started
with L for Left and had four letters so that was Left 4, Regan in the
same way indicated Right 5 and Lebling meant Left 7. So be warned
that sometimes you can think a code far more complex than it is and
waste valuable time.

RNOANEAPCOIRRUFEA! No I haven't gone bats in the belfry ... YET!!!
This is the answer to Goldbum's question in Boggit 2. The way to go
about decoding that is as follows: the first letter is the last
letter of the first half of the answer, the second letter is the last
letter of the second half, the third letter is the second - last
lettter of the first half, the fourth letter is second - last letter
of the second half and so on and so on ... that is rather a sneaky
one and, in fact, I decoded it by just rearranging the letters until
I came up with African or Eurpoean.

Hurry up and write in with your comments on Codes.

Meanwhile ... Tatty Trumpets Fluff Anyone!

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THE LOST RUBY - Wrightchoice Software - £3.95
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I wonder how many of you watch "TREASURE HUNT"? That's the Channel Four programme
which features Anneka Rice scurrying about the countryside in a helicopter, eagerly
trying to track down clues which will, hopefully, lead to the discovery of treasure
trove before the 45 minute time limit runs out! I must admit that I had deliberately
managed to avoid the programme for an awful long time ... I didn't think I could
take a whole hour of Anneka's exhuberant personality ... until a colleague at work
recently talked me into taking a look at it, with a firm assurance that I would
enjoy the show! Well, he was right ... I became hooked immediately! The programme
turned out to be very different from what I expected ... in fact, it's a fairly
intelligent and entertaining game-show with a lot of characteristics that will
appeal to adventure gamers of all kinds.

So what has all this to do with THE LOST RUBY? Well, it just happened that the
first episode of TREASURE HUNT I watched was set on the Isle Of Wight, and
featured many of the interesting locations to be found on that island ... and THE
LOST RUBY is also set on the Isle Of Wight, and features many of the interesting
locations to be found on that island!! In fact, if not for TREASURE HUNT, I don't
think I'd have ever worked out the purpose of the donkey in the Well House at
Carisbroke Castle, and wouldn't have known what to do with the beast when I came
across him in THE LOST RUBY!

But, enough of this digression, what about the plot? Well, in the summer of 1891
Queen Victoria hid a ruby somewhere on the Isle Of Wight. Throughout that year
hundreds of people searched the island for the priceless jewel, but it was not
discovered. When Queen Victoria died in 1901, the ruby had still not been found,
and its secret location was committed to the grave along with the great monarch.
Despite the passage of time, many clues still remain as to the whereabouts of the
ruby. Perhaps you can track them down ... and solve the mystery?

Is this a true tale? I know not! Does it matter? I think not!! It's as good a
premise for a "hunt the treasure" adventure as any other, and perhaps a better one
than many!

The game is written by Roy Dainty, with additional coding by Andrew Wright. The
Quill and, I assume, its associated utilities have been used, so all the features
you would expect to find in an adventure these days have been included, especially
the almost indispensable Ramsave. There's a good redesigned character set, and ample
use of colour. The graphics are functional rather than inspiring, but they do draw
quickly, and can be turned off if you so choose. The packaging is very professional,
even by Wrightchoice's high standards, with the cassette inlay boasting a colour
illustration on good quality, glossy paper. Very nice indeed!

You start the game standing in the middle of Sandown, but will soon find yourself
passing through Shanklin, Ventnor, Cowes, Ryde and plenty of other places with
familiar-sounding names. You will need to pay visits to Carisbroke Castle, Osborne
House (Queen Victoria's residence on the island), the Robin Hill Country Park, the
Wax Museum at Brading, and the wonderfully named Blackgang Chine! Almost the very
first thing that you will discover is that admittance to all these interesting
places is only possible if you have a Pass ... so you'll need to find one from
somewhere! After you've had your Pass for a while, and visited a few places, you
will find that, as with most of the good things in life, it doesn't last forever!
You'll therefore need to formulate a strategy which will get you in and out of the

necessary locations, with the necessary objects, before the Pass expires on you. This is not altogether easy as you will only be able to visit most places just once. You therefore need to thoroughly explore the whole adventure, discover all the objects, identify all the puzzles, and spot the connections or solutions between them ... and then start all over again from the beginning, keeping your fingers crossed that you've managed to work it out correctly!! Much to-ing and fro-ing and exercise of the little grey cells will be required in order to achieve success, but that's the fun of it, isn't it?

A word of warning ... after you "SHOW PASS" at the gateway to wherever you wish to go, you must then "ENTER location name" before actually going in. The "location name" expected by the programme is usually the first word in the name of the place you wish to visit. Thus, to get into the Robin Hill Country Park, the inputs required are "SHOW PASS" "ENTER ROBIN". Trying to "ENTER HILL" or "ENTER PARK" is unlikely to get you anywhere ... stick to the first word of the name in every case and you should be O.K.

The game also makes use (twice) of a favourite Wrightchoice feature ... the need to "SEARCH CAREFULLY" in particular locations. Usually I frown upon these type of inputs because I don't think they're fair ... however, in this game, they caused me no trouble at all ... probably because, having played a few Wrightchoice games now, I was expecting to have to find the feature used ... but also because "CAREFULLY" is included as a noun in the list of words which can be called up and examined by the player whenever he wishes. You can hardly accuse a writer of being unfair if he actually tells you the words he's used, can you? (I still don't like "SEARCH CAREFULLY" though!).

You will also find that some things will only happen in the game if other things have happened first or if you are carrying specific objects. Hence, the Craft Shop in the Robin Hill Country Park seems a fairly worthless location, until you enter it carrying the right object (either by design or, as in my case, by complete accident), and then some interesting things happen! Similarly, you will need to let the Cowboy win a hand of cards (Cowboys? On the Isle Of Wight?? You'll understand it when you play the game!!) before you can open up the Safe, because his winning hand provides a clue to the combination needed to get the Safe open. Even if you already know the combination, you have to go through the motions of actually letting him win or you will not open the Safe successfully! So, if you seem to be stuck, try varying your Inventory, or tackling the tasks in a different order, you could be suprised what might happen!

If all else fails however, Wrightchoice operate a postal and telephone helpline, the excellence of which I can personally vouch for. Stuck very near the end of this adventure, knowing what to do but not quite able to pull it off, I rang for assistance one evening. Unfortunately, Andrew was not in but Mrs Wright was. Despite being less than 100% familiar with the game, and being up to her ears in Christmas decorations, the lady was ever so kind and could not do enough to help me sort out my dilemma. She even went so far as to search through her husbands programming notes in the search for a meaningful clue, and she constantly assured me that I was being no bother, despite my firm conviction that I was being a damned nuisance! Eventually, between us, we worked out the correct method of tackling the problem and I was able to finish the game. I would like to thank her ever so much for her patience and perseverance. It was very much appreciated. Thank you Mrs Wright!

THE LOST RUBY is Wrightchoice's most playable adventure yet. By the time you've finished it, you'll feel like visiting the Isle Of Wight. It appears to be a very interesting place!

Reviewer - Jim O'Keeffe - Spectrum

WRIGHTCHOICE SOFTWARE, P.O. Box 100, Troon, Ayrshire, KA10 6BD.

"Marlin Games" is the brainchild of Linda Wright, who, following the success of
her games SHARPE'S DEEDS and BLACK FOUNTAIN (available from PROBE at £5.95 the
pair ... Amstrad only), has now decided to go it alone. THE JADE STONE is the first
Marlin game to appear and, as it is written using the PAW, is (thus far) available
only for the Spectrum. I must admit that I was really looking forward to playing
this game as I had heard so many good things about Linda's previous adventures, but,
not owning an Amstrad, had been unable to play them. I'm happy to say that I wasn't
disappointed!

You play Amora, the lovely daughter of Lord Senidea from the Kingdom of Nulom. Your
life has been, up to now, relatively peaceful, and you recently became engaged to
your childhood sweetheart, Amanton, who is a likeable, kindhearted chap ... but a
wimp! As is often the case in these situations, your Dad and your intended don't
exactly hit it off ... so, when rumours reach Amanton that the evil sorceror,
Mallumo of Kradoom, is about to declare war on Nulom, he gallantly announces, in
a bid to impress your Dad, that he will sort out said villain forthwith ... and
off he goes in the necessary direction! However, once a wimp, always a wimp ...
and after a decent interval has elapsed, along comes a servant of Mallumo to
deliver a ransom note to Lord Senidea. What this basically says ... once stripped
of all its legal jargon and various exemption, penalty and sanity clauses ... is
that Mallumo has captured Amanton and will only return him in exchange for your
Dad's kingdom, or for you! Well, your Dad has absolutely no intention of giving up
his kingdom to anybody ... and, luckily, he's fairly fond of you too! So, feeling
it to be his duty to rescue your fiance and defend his kingdom, he goes charging
off, at the head of his army, ready to deal out death and destruction to anybody
who gets in his way!! However, his advisor, Sajo, is none to sure that Mallumo can
be overcome by the force of armies alone. The evil one has recently gained great
new power, and only the legendary Jade Stone is magical enough to overcome him. So,
in order to rescue Amanton, and save your Dad, you set out to seek the Stone, which
is believed to be in the possession of the very strange Guardian Of Vibran Henge!!!

As you might have gathered by now, this is not an adventure which takes itself
altogether seriously ... but neither is it in the anarchic vein of humour so loved
by Delta 4. What it does do, however, is poke very gentle, but effective, fun at
some of life's situations in general, and some adventuring conventions in particular!
For example, the basic premise of the game ... the princess rushing off to rescue
the hapless prince ... is a straightforward reversal of the more used scenario ...
the gallant prince coming to the aid of the helpless maiden! Likewise with all the
funny names ... most adventures have a few ... this one has loads of them!!! But
please, don't get the impression that this is a spoof adventure of some sort, because
it is not. The story is treated seriously ... but seriously within its own limits.
Your quest to save your Dad and your fiance is of paramount importance, but, if an
amusing situation pops up along the way, why not have a quick giggle at it? Sort
of like life really, don't you think?

The game is exceedingly well presented. Black paper is used throughout, with white
ink for the location descriptions, and yellow ink for the responses to inputs. Exit
messages are highlighted in a cyan flash, and certain other messages (like when
you read a manuscript) are printed in a contrasting colour. The redesigned character
set is compact and clearly legible (I had a little trouble distinguishing the "G"
from the "O", but that could be my eyesight) and fits the adventure well. The graphic
are well drawn and pleasing to look at, but there aren't so many of them that they
intrude upon the game.

The adventure comes in two parts, and it is necessary to complete Part One before proceeding to Part Two. Extensive use is made, throughout both parts, of the PAW's "TALK TO ..." command, and much useful information can be gleaned from questioning each and every character most thoroughly ... and there are lots of characters! The writer has also gone to great trouble in order to ensure that there is a sensible response to nearly every "EXAMINE ..." command you might wish to make, and (I've said this before, but I'll say it again anyway) when the player can see the game responding to him in an intelligent fashion, he cannot help but respond to it and become involved in it ... amazing how many writers have yet to grasp that simple fact!

I suppose the strongest impression the adventure made on me, though, was the real sense I got from it of playing a female character ... this came across much more effectively than in any other game I've played. I'm not too sure why that should be ... perhaps, it was because every time you call up your Inventory, you are told that you're wearing a green gown ... or perhaps, it was because the only way I could find to get past an obstructive guard at the beginning of the game, was to bat my eyelashes and flatter the male ego ... or perhaps, it was because I had great trouble in avoiding the embraces of a handsome devil called Carmon, whose intentions weren't altogether honourable ... or perhaps, it was because of old Sajo's mutterings on the uselessness of women, which you tend to overhear from time to time ... or perhaps, it was because of all of these, and numerous other little touches which, when all put together, create a believable female persona. Whatever it was, it works well and adds a very unique atmosphere to an excellently executed adventure.

The puzzles and problems in the game are numerous, and range from the moderate to the deeply thought provoking ... but I don't think that there is anything of mindbending difficulty, or logical impossibility, in there. Most obstacles will be overcome with a little ingenuity and experimentation, and, should you be working on the right lines but not quite got it 100% right yet, the program will often give you a little prod in the correct direction ... which is nice! As always, thorough EXAMINE-ing of everything will reap dividends (and it's good to see that the abbreviation "EXAM" is recognised ... I don't think I'll ever get used to inputting "EXAMI"), and careful reading of the copious text is a must! At the end you will find that several conclusions are possible, depending on how you decide to deal with Mallumo (or how he deals with you!), but, of course, only one is totally satisfactory ... and the final message may not be quite what you might have expected!

THE JADE STONE is a very encouraging debut from Marlin Games ... well conceived, expertly written, immensely playable and enjoyable, and a little bit unusual also! I liked it a great deal! More of the same soon please, Linda!

Finally, may I just take this opportunity to say that I was greatly pleased by the way in which this adventure was submitted for review. Not only was the cassette accompanied by very full Introductory Notes and Instructions, but also by a complete set of Hints and Tips, and clearly legible maps to both parts! I haven't been so well treated for quite some time ... and it does make my job a whole lot easier! Perhaps other people could be so considerate when submitting games? In the meantime, from a grateful reviewer to an exceptional writer ... thank you, Linda!

Reviewer - Jim O'Keeffe - Spectrum

MARLIN GAMES, 19 Briar Close, Nailsea, Bristol BS19 1QG.

Every once in a while, although extremely rarely these days, something turns up, completely out of the blue, which is so wonderfully original, so brilliantly innovative, so blindingly different, that it fair takes your breathe away as soon as you set eyes on it! Such a game is Tom Frost's DOUBLE AGENT!! An adventure which, from the loading screen to the final congratulatory message, has "CLASS" stamped all over it in great, big capital letters! This one, ladies and gentlemen, is a real beaut!!!

Your starship has been sent to the planet Marego, to help overcome a rebel invading force from a dying world. The enemy force has brought with them a malevolent Crystal source of power which is slowly polluting the air, soil and water of Marego. It is only a matter of time until the planet will be unable to support its native lifeforms. You have beamed down an expeditionary force to the Marego surface, but the entire party have been overwhelmed by a vastly superior number of rebel soldiers. Most were slaughtered outright ... but a few were captured alive ... unfortunately for them! The rebels have tortured the survivors mercilessly ... driving them to the point of insanity and beyond ... only two have managed to live through the savage onslaught! Those two have now, through some means of which you are not yet aware, made their escape from their tormentors. However, due to the brutal treatment which they have received, they are now incapable of original thought or action, but they remain in contact with you through their inbuilt communicators, and will obey simple one or two word instructions. You have no choice but to attempt to proceed with your assigned mission ... if you cannot locate and capture the Crystal, a whole world will be condemned to eternal oblivion. It would also be useful if you could obtain water and rock samples from the Marego surface, so that the depth of the pollution penetration can be gauged, and remedial measures formulated. You have no choice ... you have your two agents ... one is strong but uneducated ... the other has a fluency with languages ... somehow, they will have to suffice!! Go to it!

A short section of code, before the main game, will, once loaded, outline the above scenario to you and give you instructions as to how the game is played. Once you've read all this (and noted all the salient points), the screen clears and a loading graphic, beautifully drawn by Shaun McClure, is displayed. This graphic appears not only in the usual fashion, that is being drawn from top to bottom of the screen, but also, thanks to a nifty little routine, from left to right, right to left, and even bottom to top (the method being chosen at random each time you load the game) ... which is something I've never seen a loading screen do before!

Once the main game has loaded, you are presented with a playing screen which is different from any you may have seen before. It is split into three "windows", each serving a specific function. Two are large rectangles, occupying nearly the whole of the left and right hand halves of the screen respectively. These are labelled "Agent 1 Report" and "Agent 2 Report". Each of these rectangles is split into two areas ... at the top is the location description of the place where the Agent in question finds himself, along with details of any interesting objects/features which he can see. Depending on which Agent it is, this area will consist of black text on a cyan or yellow background. Underneath the location area, is a large space where responses to your inputs, and any other messages, are displayed. In both cases, this area is coloured green and text is displayed in black. I should point out that the text displayed in all parts of the Agents Reports windows is in a redesigned, condensed mode, character set which, although fairly small, is easily read. Another nice touch is that responses "appear" to float up from the

bottom of the Report window until they are stopped, with an audible "Clunk!", at the edge of the location description area, or against a previous response. Once the response area is full, earlier messages begin to scroll up under the location descriptions.

The third "window" is an elongated rectangle occupying the last two lines right across the bottom of the screen. This is your Command Console ... the place where you enter your inputs! A redesigned character set is also used here ... but this time the letters are large and chunky ... and a series of pips and bleeps lets you know that inputs are being recognised and acted upon. To help you keep track of where you are, the background to this window will change colour to match that of the Agent you are addressing at that moment (i.e. it will be either cyan or yellow).

So, that's the playing screen ... now, how do you play?

Well, what you've got on your screen is, basically, two adventures at the same time ... Agent 1 is in one location and you may wish him to do certain things there ... Agent 2 is someplace else and will probably need to carry out different actions ... you control them both, and the experience (at least in the early stages) is very similar to playing seperate games simultaneously. I suppose chessmasters must experience similar feelings when they tackle multiple opponents ... make a move on one board ... turn to the next ... make a move there ... return to the first board ... make another move ... and so it goes on! I say that this only lasts in the early stages because, eventually, your two Agents will meet up with each other (they must ... some of the problems can only be solved by the two of them acting in tandem!), and it's then that you get the real feeling of controlling two characters in one landscape coming through ... and a very satisfying feeling it is too!

You start off in control of one Agent and you can quite happily command him to GET, DROP, EXAMINE, SEARCH and whatever else you please without being interrupted. It is only when you tell him to actually move from his present location to an adjacent one, that control automatically switches to the other Agent. Alternatively, you can retain contact for as long as you please by commanding one Agent to "WAIT" while you issue a series of instructions to the other. Control of the Agent "on hold" can be recovered by entering "1" or "2" as appropriate. The system is smooth, very responsive, and easily mastered within 5 minutes ... it also works exceedingly well!!

Well, that's enough about the technical wizardry ... what about the game?

Thought you'd never ask! The short answer is ... it's hard ... not all of it ... most of it can be cracked using a fair bit of thought and application ... but finishing the whole thing off, that's hard! Most of the play takes place in a complex of rooms within a building. The playing area itself is fairly small in comparison with most adventures these days (although it's bigger than in the Questprobe games), however, each Agent will need to visit nearly all the locations individually ... so, in effect, the game is twice as big as it looks! The problems are many and varied. Some are straightforward ... locked doors require codes, find the codes and you can open the locked doors ... others are not quite so simple ... like how to carry water in a bucket with a hole in the bottom ... some can be solved by either Agent ... some can only be dealt with by a particular Agent ... and some will require both Agents working together if they are to be overcome! Your cause is not helped by the fact that several alternative courses of action often seem to produce the required result, but only one is actually correct ... the

others will lead you to doom and despondency ... sooner or later! It's devilishly difficult but, nevertheless, deeply absorbing and maddeningly compulsive ... once you get into it, you won't give it up in a hurry!

Just to add a little spice to the proceedings, Tartan Software is offering a prize of £50 to the adventurer who can come up with the shortest solution to the game. Bearing in mind that there is more than one way in which the adventure can be successfully completed, the likelihood of more than one "shortest solution" being submitted is far from remote. Should this happen, then a tie-break will operate, and the adventurer submitting the most complete and accurate map of the game will be declared the winner. Mike Gerrard has agreed to act as judge for this part of the competition. All entries must be in by 30th June 1988, so, if you wish to take part, send a move-by-move solution, together with your map of DOUBLE AGENT, to Tartan Software just as soon as you can. Of course, first you've got to buy a copy of the game and then solve it ... ah! there's the rub!!!

As a further incentive to part you from your pennies (if any further incentive were needed), Tartan have increased the value of the package by throwing in a bonus adventure, called ESCAPE, on the B-side of the cassette. This is a quite small, locked room adventure ... the purpose of which is simply to escape from the locked room! It is not very difficult to complete ... although it may give you the odd pause or two for thought ... but is fairly entertaining nonetheless. I would suggest that any prospective adventure writers take a look at this game in order to see the standard of screen presentation which is expected these days ... even from a a budget, almost "throwaway" title like this one! It really is very good indeed. Budding authors ... take careful note!

In conclusion, DOUBLE AGENT is written entirely by Tom Frost and contains more pure machine code than any of his previous adventures. It has been six months in development, and the results prove that the effort was well worthwhile. The game is innovative, it's different, it's absorbing, it has a competition attached, and a bonus game thrown in for free! What more could anybody possibly want? Buy it! Now! And see for yourself!!

Reviewer - Jim O'Keeffe - Spectrum

TARTAN SOFTWARE, 61 Bailie Norrie Crescent, Montrose, Angus DD10 9DT.

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CHARACTERS IN ADVENTURES
by Pete Gerrard
Part Three
****

So far in this, the only mini-series in the world not to feature Joan
Collins (thank heavens), we've managed to introduce fairly simple
characters who do little more than be there, and gone on to consider
more advanced creations who are capable of contributing significantly
to the enjoyment of the game. They are also, in most cases, rather
important in the solving of it as well.

This month we'll be looking at extracts from a real game, and as
usual I'll have to make an apology for talking in BASIC rather than
any of the many utilities available. However, I'm sure that if you've
got the intelligence to be able to use one of them then you also have
the intelligence to translate from BASIC to utility.

I shall make no apology to Tony Bridge, because despite whatever he
may think we're also going to be meeting, once again, living legend,
Dimli Gloing the Wonder Dwarf! Plus a few of his pals as well, as
we're going to consider the introduction of several characters into
an adventure game. They're all different, with varying attributes
depending on their status in the adventure in question, some are
useful, some are just decoration, but we'll sort all that out when we
come to it.

By considering a real adventure you should be able to get a better
idea of how characters are used and controlled, certainly better than
if we just talked in general terms.

.So, in, order of importance we'll be meeting Strombrigner the Grey,
Legless the elf, a guide dog, Rolf Harris (how did he get in here?)
and Balin Hey. You, of course, take on the role of Dimli Gloing,
master of them all, and as such need no introduction. Oh, all right
then, a brief word. You're a dwarf, and in the game have a specific
mission to complete. No treasures to collect, just a series of
bizarre problems with at times even more bizarre solutions. Alas for
you it is impossible to complete the adventure without the help of
several accomplices, and the first one you'll meet is Strombrigner
the Grey.

Strombrigner is the hero of a couple of stories in 'Probe', and so
you should not need telling that his parents were dyslexic, hence the
unusual name.

Being a wizard, he is capable of casting spells and generally sorting
out one or two things that you can't manage, but he does have this
liking for a drop of ale or two. Too little, and he is unable to stop
his hands shaking and cannot cast a spell to save his life. Too much,
the obvious result occurs and he still cannot cast a spell. So one of
your tasks is to ensure that he manages to pay at least one visit to
the pub, but no more than four. To add to your problems, he's a
stubborn old goat, and will sometimes need a bit of persuading in
order to comply with any request you might give him.

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The following extract shows him making his first, and subsequent appearances in the game:

```
1082 IF cp=12 AND ww=0 THEN ww=1:wf=1:FOR q=1 TO 3:mess=q:GOSUB 2428:
NEXT
1084 IF wf=1 AND INT(RND(1)*100)>50 AND ss<11 THEN  mess=INT(RND(1)*3
+8:GOSUB 5990:ELSE  IF  ss>10  AND  (cp<11  OR  cp>17  THEN  mess=4:
vp=vp+1:ob%(17)=0:wf=0:ss=0:GOSUB 5990
1086 IF cp=12 AND ww=1 AND wf=0 THEN wf=1:mess=5:GOSUB 5990
```

As this is an ideas forum rather than a programming course we won't go into too much detail, but you should be able to get my drift, as that somewhat strange saying has it.

Two things to note. The subroutine at line 2428 is a simple delay loop to give you time to read a message, and the subroutine at line 5990 extracts and prints a message from a random access file, the message in question being denoted by the variable 'mess'. Right then, let's have a look at Strombrigner.

Line 1082 first of all. This is used if the wizard has never wandered into the adventure before, and you are in the correct location for meeting him. CP holds the player's current position, and location 12 being the heart of the pub means that the wizard is here. All this being the case then we set the 'wizard wandered' flag 'ww', the 'wizard following' flag 'wf', and print up three messages of description about the chap.

Line 1084 introduces a couple more variables, namely 'ss' and 'vp'. 'vp' is used to keep track of the number of visits that he makes to the pub, and 'ss' is used to keep an eye on how long Strombrigner has ·stayed·with you without being given something to do. Now then, if the wizard's following you and the random number falls within a given range and 'ss' is less than 11 then a random message about Strombrigner is printed on the screen. Unlike Thorin, the wizard sits down and sings about beer, or other things. However, if the variable 'ss' is greater than 10 then old Strombrigner gets a fit of the sulks at being given nothing to do and, provided that you're not already in the pub, he wanders off back to it, saying something along the lines of "Well, I'm off to find a decent ale house". Various flags and variables are set as a result of this.

Line 1086 is only used when you go off to retrieve the wizard, and if you're in location 12, the wizard's already been found once (ww=1), he's not following you at the moment (wf=0), then set the 'wf' flag and print up a message about him reappearing by your side and being ready to join in the game again.

Just three lines of code to give the wizard a real slice of character. He does random things, he sometimes sulks and stomps off to the pub, but when you find him again the shamefaced old boy is ever ready to try and help you out, if he can. Of course, there is a lot more code involved with Strombrigner than this, because you can talk to him and ask him to do things, but as I've said this is not a programming course. Instead, we're just discussing characters and how they can easily be introduced to your games.

Strombrigner is a meaningful character, in that the adventure cannot be finished without him being there to help you out, but the next one that we'll look at is just decoration. This is Legolas the elf, always to be found in the pub, and as the game progresses he rapidly ends up being Legless the elf, and the messages used reflect this.

```
1080 IF (cp>11 AND cp<18) THEN  l1=l1+1:PRINT:IF  l1>10  THEN  l1=10:
mess=99+l1:GOSUB 5990:ELSE mess=99+l1:GOSUB 5990
3452 IF (cp>11 AND cp<18) AND na=31 THEN mess=182+l1:GOSUB 5990: GOTO
10
```

A character should never be used in a game unless he, she, or it, adds something to it. You may feel, therefore, that Legless is a mite redundant, but when the game was being play tested one of the 'testers' said that she kept looking around the pub to see what Legless was going to get up to next, completely forgetting about getting on with the adventure in order to keep track of our friendly elf. So, he fulfills his purpose by adding enjoyment to the game. So much so that someone else (hello Sandra!) told me that she wanted to talk to him as well, and in a very simple way we can take care of that possibility also.

Line 1080 checks first of all to see that you're in the pub, and if so the 'legolas legless' variable is incremented by one. Since the chap can only handle so much beer we then see how many he's had, and print up a suitable message informing the player of the elf's current state of health. Once he's had enough he becomes totally incapable of doing anything at all, and the final message in the sequence is then used. There are ten messages used in total, and that seemed to be enough to keep people amused whilst playing the game.

Line 3452 is the 'talk to legless' line, which again checks to see whether you're in the pub. If you are, and you're talking to noun number 31 ("legless"!) then we use the 'legolas legless' variable 'l1' again in order to extract a suitable message from our file. Again, you're not really talking to him in the sense that the responses are pre-programmed, but it serves to enhance the feeling of genuineness about the elf, and just adds to the enjoyment.

The game is capable of being solved without Legless being in there at all, but it would be a poorer game without him.

We'll draw a discreet veil over the activities of Rolf Harris and Balin Hey (I'll have to start marketing the thing so that you can meet them for yourself!) and finish off by looking at the guide dog.

At first he started off by being like the elf, just there for decoration, but at a suggestion from Pat Winstanley he grew to play a much more active part in the game. She said, reasonably enough, that people are fed up with looking for torches to light their path in a cave, so why not use the guide dog in that respect, to guide you through the darkness of the caves?

Good idea, and so that is what this particular character now does.

```
2457 IF na=61 AND db=1 AND pp=1 THEN pd=0:lo=1:PRINT "It decides  to
follow you.":ob%(61)=-1:zz=zz+1:GOTO 10:ELSE IF na=61 AND  db=0  THEN
mess=204:GOSUB 5990:GOTO 10:ELSE IF na=61  AND  pp=0  THEN  mess=205:
GOSUB 5990:GOTO 10
```

Before using the guide dog you have to get hold of it, of course, and
that is the purpose of this line. As with Strombrigner there is
plenty more code concerning the dog, but this should give you some
idea anyway.

The noun variable 'na' is equal to 61 if the player is trying to get
the dog. If the 'dog given bone' variable 'db' and the 'played pool'
variable 'pp' are both equal to one then you can safely take the dog.
Thus we turn off the 'pitch dark' variable 'pd' turn on the 'light
on' variable 'lo' (both of which are checked when the player is deep
underground in the inky blackness) and put the dog in the player's
possession after printing up a suitable message. If either of the two
variables 'pp' and 'db' are not set (and if you want to know why it's
necessary to play pool before getting the dog then you'll just have
to play the game!) then one of two messages is printed up, depending
on which one hasn't been set.

CONCLUSION
We've only looked at six lines of code governing three very different
characters, but that should be enough to give you an idea of what
they're about, how they work, and how they affect the game. No
character should be put in if it doesn't, in some way, make for a
better game, and in their own individual ways Strombrigner, Legless
and the guide dog, all contribute to the enjoyment of the adventure
as a whole.

Well, I hope I've managed to give you an insight into a) how I write
adventures, and b) what, as a player and reviewer, I'm looking for in
other people's games. Characters are all important, don't neglect
them.

<div align="center">Byeee!</div>

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::

Has anyone got a book called "Writing Adventure Programs for your Micro Computer", by Usbourne, that I can beg/borrow/buy?

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::

LETTERS

I thought that I would bring to your notice that I have lost £3.99 to Bargain Software, London, as advertised in "Your Sinclair" and "Sinclair User". This firm has had £3.99 of mine for a tape they couldn't supply months ago. I have written four times including returning their official letter asking if I wished my money refunded (YES!).

I told them in the third letter I would be reporting their behaviour to "Your Sinclair" and "Sinclair User" and the last letter I sent mentioned taking legal action. (No response to any.) The telephone number in the advertisement has been altered and the exchange gave a new number - this has always been engaged or no answer. I once let it ring for 10 minutes and no reply. I then redialled almost immediately and it was engaged. I have tried again today and it rings okay but no-one answers. (I think it is a shop (?) at Hammersmith.)

I wrote to Mike Gerrard and he replied saying he had passed my letter to the Advertising Manager and hoped I have received the money by now (although not his province). I heard nothing from the Advertising Manager of "Your Sinclair" so I wrote to him and had no response. I have written to the Editor of "Sinclair User" and got no reply so I wrote to the Advertising Manager of the same magazine and again no reply.

I since tried to contact "Your Sinclair" by phone Christmas Eve, and was told that Advertising Manager was still at lunch 2.40 p.m. but she would pass the message on and sort it out. I even gave my ex-directory telephone number - no response to date.

I have today written to Mike Gerrard and told him I shall no longer be buying either "Your Sinclair" or "Sinclair User" after many years in view of the 'couldn't care less' attitude of these two magazines and their staff. Mike is the exception as he has always had my interests at heart and I wished him all luck in the future, and I signed off with regret.

I feel that it is a matter of Probity and Principal that a firm like "Bargain Software" can behave thus and no-one cares a damn, even though the amount I have lost is only £3.99.

DR. W. H. C. BATHAM, The Whisperings, Sandhills Lane, Virginia Water, Surrey. GU25 4BW

(In cases like this magazines are wary of printing anything that could be construed as libellous. However, I feel that I must point out that many of the columnists who write for these magazines do so on a freelance basis and therefore have no power in this kind of situation. If I were in this predicament I would tot up all the costs incurred so far trot off to a solicitor and ask him to write to the firm concerned, adding his fee to the amount you are claiming. It doesn't always work but sometimes the threat of legal action and possible large court costs is enough for firms to pay up. I'm sorry I can't be of more help, perhaps one of our readers could give you some better advice.......Sandra)

Not being a prolific pen-pusher, I tend to let things build up to a
point where I decide to kill 53 birds with one stone. So here goes...

Graham Wheeler's definition of mapping in September's issue had me
laughing out loud. How often have you had a series of smaller and
smaller scrunched-up location boxes on one edge of your sheet before
you concede that you've got to sellotape another sheet onto it (only
to find that there's only one more location to map - a dead end!)
while in the other direction, there's a vast expanse of blank paper?
I know it's happened to me a few times, and like Mandy Rodrigues
says, it's the simple things that can be so frustrating. So ... nice
one Graham.

In Mandy's recent articles, particularly the one on mazes, she missed
out one technique which I use and which you may like to include in
your magazine.

In text and graphics adventures leave the graphics ON. If you move
(N, E, D etc.) and the picture does not redraw itself, then you are
in the same location. If the picture changes or the same picture
redraws itself then you are in a new location.

This can help when you have a limited number of objects in your
inventory and/or cannot drop them for one reason or another.

MARK BUTLER, 11 Stone Pit Close, Lowton, Warrington. WA3 2TD

****

I enjoyed reading Graham Collier's review of ENERGEM ENIGMA, which I
have just completed (with a lot of help from him!) and concerning
Precision Games, please note that Richard, who lives at the address
given (2 Fern Hill) has dropped out of the Eighteam temporarily, in
order to do a correspondence course, so any communication should now
be addressed to 33 Holst Close, Stanford-le-Hope, Essex SS17 8Rb,
although letters sent to Fern Hill will be forwarded.

I enjoyed the magazine very much - bits of everything in it! Reviews,
hints, a story, Mandy's amusing "definitions" and her excellent
parody of Duncan's speech, an interesting article on Tartan Software
... what more could an adventurer ask?

Thank you for a very interesting magazine.

JUNE ROWE, 46 Hurdon Way, Launceston. PL15 9HX

(Thanks for the information June, glad you enjoyed the mag. Got to
print letters of praise every so often so that everybody knows I get
the occasional one! ... Sandra)

****

:::

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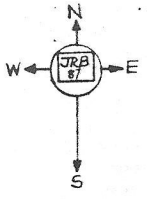:::

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Ⓐ   Ⓑ   Ⓑ

FOREST B   FOREST C   Ⓐ
Ⓑ

Ⓐ   Ⓑ
Ⓐ   Ⓑ

FOREST A   FOREST D   Ⓐ
Ⓐ

FINISH
INSIDE CABIN
(Key)

TREEHOUSE
(Battery)   Ⓐ

START
BEND IN ROAD
(Mittens)   OUTSIDE CABIN
(Axe)   D   EDGE OF FOREST
(Screwdriver)

UP BESIDE A TREE
(St. Christopher)   FOREST CLEARING
(Torch)   Ⓐ

LOST PROPERTY OFFICE
(Suitcase)
(Crucifix)

MINES!   Ⓑ

RAILWAY STATION
(Football)   RAILWAY TRACK
(Hammer)   TUNNEL   TUNNEL   TUNNEL   TUNNEL   RAILWAY STATION
(Gold Coin)   WAITING ROOM
(Fountain)   ENGINE SHED
(Grindstone)

OUTSIDE STATION
(Taxi Rank)

② TO/FROM ROAD

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Ⓐ BACK IN THE FOREST MAZE!!!

TOP OF STEPS
(Paper Bin)   "SWIM"
(CARRY JUST TWO ITEMS!!)   OUTSIDE CASTLE
(Pack of Cards)   IN CASTLE
(Cannonball)
(Door)

TO/FROM OUTSIDE STATION
①

FIELD
(Sign)

FIELD
(Sign)

ROAD
(Spanner)   PARK
(Gnome)

MEADOW
(Mushroom)   MEADOW
(Hoof Prints)   MEADOW
(Butterfly)   MEADOW
(Calf/Lion!)   MEADOW
(Toadstools)

GRAVEYARD
(Sundial)

IN CHURCH
(Vase of Flowers)   D   BASEMENT
(Can of Oil)
(Door)   PASSAGE
(Candle)   END OF PASSAGE
(Loudspeaker)
U

TOP OF TOWER
(Door)
(Princess)

VAULT
(Coffin)
(Paper)
(Magic Ring)

BOTTOM OF TOWER
(Sign)

A short series of interviews with some of the
best of the small adventure software houses.

No. 3 in a set of 4: MARK DAVIES, ANDREW DEAN
****
and LEE HODGSON .... THE ESSENTIAL MYTH
****

All three of the young men who comprise THE ESSENTIAL MYTH are 19 years old,
single, and students. MARK goes to Trinity College in Oxford, while both ANDREW
and LEE attend Loughborough University. Between them, they are the proud possessors
of a BBC Micro, two 48k Spectrums, a Spectrum +3, an Atari ST ... and most of a
ZX81!

                    ****

PROBE: Let's get the most obvious question out of the way first ... why "The
Essential Myth"? Where did the name come from?

ANDY: The phrase was blatantly plagiarised from the lyrics of a song by the
immortal, and completely unknown, "Martian Dustbins Invade The Outer Hebrides":

                I couldn't stand the whiff
                I had to kill you with a crowbar
                Aboard the good ship "Essential Myth"
            .   And the wheel just fell off my car!

LEE: Actually, we wrote a computer program to randomly select titles ... and it
came up with "The Essential Myth"! We have hundreds of spare titles if anybody
needs one ... for a small fee, of course!

MARK: The name is a combination of words with a sublime connotation. Such words as
"eternal", "absolute", "abyss" and "mythical" evoke the sublime. We felt the name
offered the correct blend of relevance and subtlety (i.e. "the essential" = "the
essence of the").

PROBE: Errr ... yes ... quite! Has anyone got an aspirin? I think I feel one of
my headaches coming on!
Whatever made you want to set up on your own in the first place?

LEE: We decided to publish ourselves after BOOK OF THE DEAD was turned down by
Incentive Software. The actual process of setting up was fairly simple ... we
just had to talk the bank manager into accepting cheques made payable to "Essential
Myth"! However, the difficult bit is trying to generate sales through mail order.
For some reason, people seem to think that all mail order companies simply exist
in order to take the money and run! But, in the majority of cases, this is just not
true! In fact, most of the small companies who do business in this fashion, are
known to give their customers a better service than can be got from the "big"
concerns!

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PROBE: Hasn't advertising helped to generate sales?

LEE: We haven't advertised in any significant way in the main computer press, because we are very sceptical of the effectiveness of "mail order only" adverts. However, we have placed adverts in all of the major fanzines and, to be quite honest, they haven't been worth the paper they were written on! Response to them has averaged at about one per advert! This has suprised us greatly as we expected that the people who read fanzines would be enthusiasts who would be willing to take a "risk" and buy software by mail order! We have been VERY disappointed. So much so, that we cannot see any point in putting in the hard work necessary to provide software in this fashion any more. Accordingly, we now consider ourselves to be freelance adventure writers and will not be publishing games in the future! We'll leave that to somebody else!

PROBE: Is that why CRL have now taken over the marketing of BOOK OF THE DEAD?

LEE: We had almost given up hope that any company was going to take BOOK OF THE DEAD and publish it, when Derek Brewster gave it 88% in Crash! Michael Hodges at CRL wrote to us almost immediately after that requesting a copy. He liked it ... and that, as they say, was that!

PROBE: Have the reactions from other reviewers been the same as Derek Brewster's?

LEE: We sent BOOK OF THE DEAD to the three major Spectrum mags, as well as C&VG. Mike Gerrard reviewed it in the April issue of Your Sinclair, and Derek Brewster reviewed it in the July issue of Crash. Sinclair User did not review it at all when it was originally submitted by us, but printed a favourable review once the game appeared on a major label! They say that this was because the game had some strange bugs in it the first time they played it ... which is odd because we didn't change the game at all between the first and second submissions they received!

PROBE: Well, I thought BOOK OF THE DEAD was very good too! I still maintain that its the most impressive debut release I've seen in a long time. How conscious were you, while writing it, of the need to make it different from the usual?

MARK: We tried to be innovative in the way of puzzles ... but half the time we ended up just inverting the normal adventure stuff. Like, making dying the ultimate aim of the game, and introducing an undead monster which needs to be restored to life rather than killed! We even put directional signposts into the maze in order to guide the player through!!

LEE: However, many of the puzzles still fall back on what I'd call "standard adventure-type format". A few too many in my opinion. Of course, if we were to do it all again, we'd probably do it a little differently. I'd particularly like to improve the writing style so that the player feels more involved in the actual setting ... like he really was in ancient Egypt.

MARK: What we'd really need though, is something other than GAC to do it with, then we could put much more Egyptian atmosphere in to it. We would have loved to have drawn all the graphics as authentic Egyptian paintings. Their style of art was truly unique, and radically different from our own! For example, they drew people in a "side on" manner in order to show to the fullest the main features of the human body. Hence, the face would be in profile, the chest would be turned to the viewer, and the legs would be in side view again!

PROBE: You used the term "Ma'at Levels" in the scoring system for BOOK OF THE DEAD. Would you like to explain what a "Ma'at Level" actually is?

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MARK: "Ma'at" has many meanings, suitably enough. One is "universal peace and harmony". Another is "the state of the world, be it good or bad". "Cosmic balance" is a good one. By ascending "Ma'at" levels, we mean that you are contributing to restoring the ultimate, correct state of the universe!

PROBE: Sheesh! And I thought I was just scoring points! Your other current release is a very different type of product from THE BOOK OF THE DEAD, being an add-on for an adventure-writing utility ... THE GACPAC. Didn't Incentive object to the use of that name?

LEE: No. Incentive actually gave us permission to use the name "GAC" in THE GACPAC. However, they turned the product itself down flat ... without even seeing it!

PROBE: You've said before that it wouldn't have been possible to create THE BOOK OF THE DEAD without the GACPAC. In what way would it have been impossible?

MARK: We simply wouldn't have been able to fit the game into the memory available to us without the GACPAC. We estimate that it must have saved us about 5k per part.

PROBE: Any plans for a GACPAC PLUS?

ANDY: I have developed some ideas for a GACPAC PLUS ... like swapping mid-text between character sets, a Ramsave, and a command to call external machine code routines, etc. However, since PAW already boasts all these features, they will probably end up being added to the pile of junk on my bedroom floor. Unless, of course, there is a demand from GAC users for these routines!

PROBE: How to you go about the actual business of writing the adventure?

MARK: We try to use a system that works, so we take turns to ...
    a) do the typing
    b) tell the person typing what to type
    c) criticize the efforts of the typist
       and the one giving instructions
    d) try and find the vital piece of paper
       that's gone missing
    e) sleep
It's a shame really that there's only three of us!

LEE: Yeah, and I know which one Mark prefers! It comes in the alphabet just before "f"!

****
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   features, and a host
   of programming tips.
   Available by mail
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   Price £1.50
****

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PROBE: Do you intend to continue using the GAC for your future adventure creating?

MARK: Unfortunately, GAC has quickly proved to be too limiting, so we are currently using PAW (and a Spectrum +3) to write our latest game. Personally, I do not feel that PAW is a conceptual advancement over GAC. It gains its increased flexibility by providing a larger range of specific facilities that, in themselves, are not too flexible. So, for example, it has a powerful DOALL action which makes it very simple to cope with, say, "GET ALL". But this feature in itself is not flexible, so you could use it to implement, for example, an "EXAMINE ALL" objects command, but only if you restrict the EXAMINE to objects in the current location which are carried by the player. GAC's approach is fundamentally better in that it does not provide many built in facilities like DOALL, but instead tries to provide a far more powerful command language ... just try converting something like MESS CTR CTR 3 into PAW! Unfortunately, GAC did not go far enough, which is why it is ultimately not as good an utility as PAW ... but it ought to have been!

LEE: PAW is really the first utility which allows the different styles of different writers to shine through and, as such, will do a lot to finally banish all those criticisms about utility-created adventures being all alike. There is no reason why any two PAW'd games should be similar ... if the writers don't want them to be!

MARK: There was probably some justification for the "utilities stifle creativity" argument in the beginning, but it is now totally outweighed by other factors. Firstly, adventure games seem to be an ideal area for the application of games-writing utilities, as is shown by the continuing popularity of even QUILLED adventures. More modern adventure writers, such as PAW, are fairly powerful, and allow the programmer access to custom machine code routines if necessary. Although it is not possible to transcend the genre with these utilities, it seems likely that, as in most fields, creativity is often enhanced by working within a (fairly general) framework. Finally, it must be true that if it were necessary to write adventures only in machine code or in a compiled language, then the genre would be a very pale shadow of what it is! After all, can you really expect a programmer to be able to create adventures?!

LEE: Similar criticisms are aimed at tie-in games ... people say that this kind of software "stifles creativity" also. But there is no reason why this should be so! It's only because certain software houses seem to think that, once a game has a "big name" title, then the game itself can be quite shoddy ... and still sell well!

MARK: If done imaginatively, so that the game builds upon or enhances the ideas of the source, then I can see no reason why a tie-in product should be of any lesser quality than a non-tie-in product. Mainly it's just the software house trying to foist sub-standard merchandise onto the widest possible audience!

ANDY: I'd love to do a big tie-in! Maybe something by Stephen King ... or something out of comics, like Halo Jones, or The Watchmen, or Swamp Thing ... or even something based on a cult T.V. character ... like William Woollard!

PROBE: William Woollard!!! Pass the aspirin again ... I think my headaches coming back!
Let's change the subject ... tell us about your latest adventure?

ANDY: We can't.

LEE: Well, we can ... but we can't tell you the title because it's all very hush-hush!

ANDY: Originally, we intended for FAIRY TALE to be our next game, but, for technical reasons, we've had to postpone that. Instead, we're doing a three part graphical adventure based on a novel of the Gothic variety.

MARK: I wanted to do Kafka's "The Metamorphosis", or something by Dostoyevsky, but, we eventually decided that an adaptation of a novel by an English writer would have much more popular appeal. We were also very impressed by the vividity of said writers prose ... very intriguing! So, for initial research, we've been immersing ourselves in his works in order to get a feel for the style of his writing, and reading critiques and analyses of Gothic fiction in general. This will give us an understanding of the psychological symbolism inherent in the genre. Only with this weight of knowledge behind us did we feel prepared to begin programming the adventure itself ... which we are now about half way through.

LEE: Errrr ... that's right!

ANDY: What's he talking about??

PROBE: Forget the aspirin ... I think I need a strong drink!!

LEE: In some respects, this adventure could be construed as a tie-in (of sorts), and it proves the points we were making earlier because it is both highly innovative and creative ... well, we think so anyway!

PROBE: Finally, how do you see adventures, and adventuring, developing in the future?

MARK: I am deeply disappointed by the current state of the adventure genre, and feel that it is a sign of its stagnation that a game such as THE BOOK OF THE DEAD can achieve the recognition that it has. Make no mistake! I still think that BOOK OF THE DEAD is a very enjoyable game, and should not disappoint any adventurer who decides to try it! But, it is only a good adventure in comparison with the rest of the field.
I have always felt that adventures, in their guise as "interactive fiction", should be one of the most exciting areas in the computing sphere ... firstly, in their progress towards such A.I. concepts as natural language parsing and computer-supported characterisation ... and secondly, for their potential to be literature. Where are all the great innovations? THE HOBBIT was claimed to be innovative, but it looked primitive (and cynically untested) after a minutes play! Magnetic Scrolls parser, in its claims to sophistication, overlooks the mundane! Infocom are, perhaps, admirable ... but are they more interested in innovation, or in selling a lot of adventures! The two are not the same!
Current adventures are, let's face it, games ... when they could be Art! They could be works that take us out of ourselves, tell us about the Human condition, or leave us pondering the eternal verities! They could be meaningful!
They are games, when they could be a brave new Literature!
I find this sad ... but I remain hopeful!

PROBE: Mark ... Lee ... Andy ... thank you very much! Good fortune in the future! Now then, what happened to that strong drink we were talking about ......

Jim O'Keeffe

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****

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jarring impact with a series of pot holes rolls
to a halt at the start of a gravel drive. You
try turning the keys again and again, but to no
avail. Resigning yourself to this, you peer
outside the car and see only the gravelled drive
and dense foliage. Having lost your way many
miles earlier, this is the first sign of
habitation you have seen. Sitting somewhat cold
and miserable with your companion, you discuss
the possibilities of finding help at the end of
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Getting You Started

<u>THE DOOMSDAY PAPERS</u> - Spectrum - Martech - J. R.

ENTER MACHINE, TAKE SPACESUIT, WEAR SPACESUIT, SOUTH, EAST, TAKE
MEAT, NORTH, EAST, UP, WEST, TAKE BOOTS, WEAR BOOTS, ENTER HATCH
(craft now takes off), WAIT (craft crashes but you survive), SOUTH
(you are attacked), GIVE MEAT, INVENTORY (you now have a security
key), NORTH, TAKE SPADE, DIG, TAKE PEN, DROP SPADE, WEST, NORTH,
NORTH (or any other direction, and you fall into a tunnel), EAST,
CLIMB LADDER, SOUTH (guard asks you for your key), GIVE KEY, EAST,
TAKE PASS, WEST, SOUTH, EAST, MOVE RUBBISH, TAKE COIN, WEST, SOUTH,
ENTER TRAIN, INSERT COIN, EAST (lady police officer calls you), EAST,
(she sees you are unarmed and takes you through to the Hover Car
Park), EAST, NORTH, EAST, TYPE BUS, TAKE TICKET, WEST, WEST, ENTER
BUS..............

<u>PARADISE CONNECTION</u> - Spectrum - Birdseed Software - J. R.

SOUTH, EAST, UP, NORTH, OPEN CUPBOARD, REMOVE SUIT, GET VEST, WEAR
VEST, WEAR SUIT, SOUTH, GET BLANKET, DOWN, WEST, SOUTH, EAST, EAST,
COVER WINDOW, EXAMINE PAINTING, LOOK, OPEN SAFE, LOOK, GET JEWEL,
WEST, WEST, SOUTH (you are now clobbered by a freak wave!), NORTH,
GET STICKS, WEST, GET FLINT, EAST, SOUTH, LIGHT FIRE (Helicopter
picks you up), UP, NORTH, IN HELICOPTER, PRESS BUTTON, (fails to
start), EXAMINE BUTTON, GET SHADES, WEAR SHADES, EXAMINE BUTTON, GET
CHEESE, OUT HELICOPTER, NORTH, SPEAK JOE (he wants you to find his
mouse, believe it or not!), NORTH, WEST, DOWN, DOWN, FEED MOUSE, UP,
UP, EAST, SOUTH (Joe flies you back).....................

<u>CASTLE THADE REVISITED</u> - Spectrum - Margo Forteous
From the start go north, get pod, south, south, east, get stick, exam
well [the witch wants her son's head (Tononius)], west, north, east,
follow track, east, north, get skull (on examining the skull you find
it is Tononius), south, east (to donkey), throw pod (this frightens
the donkey and it breaks free, leaving the rope), get rope, get
straw, west, west, follow track, west, south, east, tie rope (to
skull), lower skull (witch thanks you and gives you invitation to
stay at Faulty Towers), west, north, east, follow track, east, north,
east (to Faulty Towers), in (you are dumped in a room with a bed with
a spring jutting out of the mattress), west, down, south (Hotel
Lounge), exam dust (message says "PULL SPRING THREE TIMES"), north,
up, east, pull spring, pull spring, pull spring (you now see a
flint), get flint, west, down, west, south, east, exam forge (you see
a pair of bellows attached to the wall), blow bellows, light straw
(smoke blows to the south), south, get (iron) bar, north, west, west,
follow track, west, south, roll boulder (reveals cave entrance),
enter cave, get torch, light torch, down, south, crawl altar, cut
web, get web, north, west, drink water, east, east, plug holes (with
web), get crystal, west, south, turn holder (altar moves showing
staircase leading down)...........................

****
      (Contributions wanted for this section please ... Sandra)

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Precision Corner

CRACKS OF FIRE - J. R.
When you meet an Orc: "BRANDISH PHIAL".

CUDDLES - J. R.
To pass rocking horse, type words from the blocks: "DOBBIN".

MIAMI MICE
To get help you need the walkie talkie, 'CALL CHIEF' or 'CALL FOR BACKUP'. To get out of the cats basket 'GNAW ROPE'. To get some money, from inside the Guinea Pig Bank, 'JOIN QUEUE, WAIT, INSERT CASHCARD INTO MACHINE, GET MONEY, GET CASHCARD.'

GIANT - J. R.
To deal with spider: "THRUST LANCE" (AT SPIDER).

THE HERMITAGE
To get the bag of coins you need the blanket. Take it to the river and 'WET BLANKET, WEAR BLANKET.' Go to the burning hut then 'IN, GET CHALK, DRAG BODY, SEARCH BODY, GET BAG OF COINS.'

DARK CRYSTAL - J. R.
The answer to the riddle (asked by the being with a long arm and eye) is : "MOON DAUGHTERS". ("SPEAK BEING" if it doesn't ask you!)

BOOK OF THE DEAD - J. R.
1. After reading the scroll to invoke Bes, the Gnome: "CURE ME" (or "RID CURSE" or "RID DISEASE")
2. Watchword is "SOMETHING" - literally!!
3. When you have water, vegetable gum and charcoal "MIX GUM WITH CHARCOAL IN WATER" to obtain ink.
4. When you have glue (flour and water in bowl) get Head of Shabti and "MEND SHABTI" or "GLUE HEAD TO BODY" or "JOIN HEAD TO BODY".

WINTER WONDERLAND - Linda Friend
To build the Hang Glider you need the Supa Glu and the DIY Manual, then 'OPEN PARCEL, READ MANUAL, BUILD KIT.'

****

KINGS & QUEENS OF THE CASTLE

If you would like to offer help in this section then send in your name and address and full list of completed adventures. Don't forget to send in updates of completed adventures.

If you write for help to one of our Kings/Queens then please don't forget to enclose an I.R.C. or S.A.E.

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Part 4 (Final part)
I took quite a long time thinking how to get the lift operational,
but eventually had the problem solved!

I took the bucket and went through to the patio and surveyed the
silent garden. I remembered at last where the garden pond was
situated and I headed north and then northwest. Here I nearly fell
over a shovel that someone had carelessly left around and cursed
loudly as I nursed my bruised ankle. I headed northeast and there was
the pond. I filled the bucket and, seeing that it was leaking badly,
literally raced back to the lift and hung the bucket on the second
peg. There wasn't a moment to lose. I rushed upstairs, opened the
closet door and stepped onto the roof of the closet and waited
expectantly. A second or two later I felt my stomach lurch as the
lift raced upwards with me standing precariously on its roof! When it
stopped I opened a door in the wall and stepped at last into the
elusive attic!

There was a large trunk here which I couldn't open at all. There was
a loft ladder attached to the closed hatch also. After trying
unsuccessfully to open the trunk for some time, I gave up and opened
the hatch and lowered the ladder to the floor below. As I did so
there was a click from the trunk behind me and I found that the lid
had been loosened! I opened it and was amazed to find that my seventh
treasure was a hydrant of all things!

Now I knew that I really had to start exploring outside so, making
sure I had the map with me I deposited the hydrant in the sitting
room and prepared to start out. I had the skis, the matchbox and the
map. I was just about to leave the room when I decided to collect one
of the wax candle statuettes, just in case my torch went out, and set
off to the patio.

Heading north and northwest again, I came across the dreaded shovel
and, to save tripping over it again, I took it along with me for good
measure. (I was very glad later that I had done so!) I skirted the
pond and went north to the dreaded hedge maze. I paused a moment to
take a deep breath and then plunged in. It took absolutely ages to
get to the centre of the maze. I carefully followed the map but it
was still extremely easy to take a wrong turning. Then in the centre
of the maze I was nearly reduced to tears because there was nothing
to be found. I had come all this way for nothing! I turned to retrace
my steps when I saw that the ground just here had been dug fairly
recently, so, clutching the spade, I set to work and soon blessed the
impulse that had made me bring it along. I unearthed my eighth
treasure which was a large rubber stamp! I fairly raced back through
the maze to plonk it with my other treasures. Now I had only one more
treasure to find and then the whole estate would belong to me!

I was sure that the last treasures just must be in the garden
somewhere. I realised that I hadn't explored round the outer sides of
the maze yet so I hurried back and went round to the back of the
maze. Here I found myself on the ridiculous canon emplacement which
Uncle had had built for some strange reason.

I examined the canon carefully to see if there was anything inside it but could find nothing. I couldn't even open the little compartment here because one of the wheels of the canon was standing on top of it. I examined the pile of canon balls and found only one that was loose and threw it into the canon in disgust!

I went north down the cliff to a flat section just below and saw a large ladder lying beside a closed hatch. I could neither open the hatch nor carry the blasted ladder up the cliff. I dropped my flashlight and realised that I didn't need it anyway outside because of the bright full moon and tried again. No luck!

I scrambled up to the emplacement again in a furious burst of bad temper. Everything had been going so well and now I was well and truly stuck for inspiration. It just wasn't fair! I lit the fuse on the canon with the match in desperation! The canon went off with a deafening roar that left my ears ringing! But my match hadn't been wasted after all because the blast had knocked the canon back a few feet and I could now open the compartment with ease. Inside, I discovered my ninth treasure. It was a catcher's mask! These treasures were getting weirder by the minute!

I headed east to the northeast corner of the garden and was just about to proceed southwards to the house with the mask when I noticed that there was a little path heading off to the east here. I wandered along it until I came to the top of the old beach stairs and began to climb down. There wasn't much point in doing so because after a short distance I found that the stairs had rotted away and it was impossible to proceed any further. Back up I went again and, standing at the top of the steps I paused and thought what best to do next.

The only item I had with me now, that I hadn't found a use for was the skis. Try as I might I couldn't think of a thing to do with them. I tried them on to see the effect but wasn't impressed. What on earth should I do next?

I turned to look at the steps once more and completely forgot that I was still wearing the skis. My feet seemed to get tangled up and the more I tried to regain my balance the more entangled they became. Suddenly, I managed to wrench the skis apart and with the sudden jolt I was propelled forwards! Oh horror of horrors! Can you imagine anything so awful as that situation I found myself in?

There I was with my legs wide apart with one ski on one railing of the stairs and the other ski stuck on top of the other railing, and to make matters worse, I found myself beginning to move down at a gradually increasing speed until I let out a scream of pure terror as I plunged down the stairs, up into the air and down, ever so far down to land with a plonk on the beach below. I hurtled across the sand and was just resigning myself to skidding into the ocean when, thankfully, I skidded to a halt beside the remains of a camp fire on the sand.

You could never imagine the speed with which I divested myself of these infernal skis. I plonked onto the sand to regain my composure and what dignity I could muster and then looked around.

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There was a match lying on the sand beside me and I took it. I wouldn't need it now though because I could light my candle statuette at the camp fire just as easily. I lit the statuette and watched as the wax began to melt and idly rubbed the match in the wax until it was covered in the stuff. Then I noticed that the statuette was being ruined by the fire and quickly blew it out.

Now that I was somewhat recovered from my hair raising experience I decided to explore the beach while I tried to formulate some plan of how to get back up the stairs again. Going south and west I found myself in a most beautiful grotto with a pool of water leading out to the ocean. I don't really know why I decided to take a swim but it looked so inviting that I couldn't resist it. I entered the cool water and dived down to see how deep it was. I pride myself on being a good swimmer (if not skier!) and was thoroughly enjoying myself when I noticed a strange current coming from the west so I swam westwards and soon found myself coming up in another cave. It was quite dark and I couldn't see so I felt my way north to a ledge and climbed out of the water. I stumbled blindly northwards into some kind of tunnel and up into a large area. Then I remembered that I had covered the match with wax which would have protected it from the water and, striking it, I lit the statuette and was amazed at the sight that met my eyes!

Suspended from the roof by a pulley and a rope tied to a pipe near the floor was a huge safe! Below this I saw a sawhorse with a long stout plank laid across it like a seesaw. Up in the ceiling far out of reach was a closed hatch from which dangled a stout chain and on the wall were two stout hooks! I pulled the chain and the hatch opened but it was still too high up to reach. I pondered the problem for a moment or two then had an idea.

I lowered the right end of the plank until it was just under the hatch. Put the burning statuette under the rope that was holding up the safe and climbed onto the right end of the plank. The rope started burning and suddenly gave way. The heavy safe crashed down onto the other end of the plank and I was catapulted into the air through the open hatch to land with a terrible crash onto the cliff beside the ladder! I was extremely grateful to find no bones broken and in no time at all I had chucked the ladder down through the hatch. Grabbed the flashlight which, praise be, I had left here earlier and jumped back down to explore the safe.

First things first though, so I lifted the ladder onto the hooks so that I could climb out again and examined the safe. There was a plaque on it which, at first was meaningless to me, then I realised something, the top line of writing on the plaque could indicate the combination. I tried it out - left to 4 then right to 5 and then back left to 7. It worked!

Inside the safe I found a reel of film, the very film that Uncle had been watching when he died, my final treasure! In the safe with it was a note and a little peg. It looked like the peg to fit the hole in the lift! I was getting quite excited as I read the note. It said I should come on down for a surprise! Wow! Were there eleven treasures to find instead of ten?

I hurried back to the house and put the mask and reel of film in the
sitting room and hurried into the lift. I immediately tried the peg
in the peg hole and got the most terrible shock! The floor gave way,
and I hurtled down a smooth chute. All my possessions flew out of my
hands in my struggle to stop myself and I landed with a thump in the
middle of the strangest situation yet!

There before me, tied to a conveyor belt and rapidly heading towards
a whirling saw blade was, none other than, AUNT HILDEGARDE! I
couldn't believe my eyes. There was a man standing over her with his
back towards me but when Auntie saw me and screamed for help he
turned and I recognised my old enemy - Cousin Herman!

There was madness in his eyes and I saw that there wasn't a moment to
spare. Quickly I looked round me for a weapon. This was obviously a
prop room and most of the items must be props and therefore useless
but I was desperate. I grabbed the props one by one and launched
myself into the attack. Thank goodness my hands eventually grabbed
one of the props which wasn't a prop and, when the blow landed on
Herman he screamed and took to his heels. I rushed towards the saw
and stopped it just in the nick of time!

As I helped Aunt Hildegarde to her feet she looked sheepishly at me,
she knew she had a great deal of explaining to do! "I had to do it"
she said, "I had to be sure that you were worthy of inheriting
everything so I faked my death and hung around to watch your
progress. I would have met you before now if it hadn't been for
stupid Herman and his tricks. Still, all's well that ends well isn't
it my Pumpkin?"

Adventure completed

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX******************XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

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Orders should be sent to the address on the front cover of 'Probe'.

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Part 1.

Your quest starts in the Sword and Buckler inn. Go W, to the scullery
and GET SAPPHIRE, then W, into the garden. CLIMB TREE and you find an
acorn. Go N, N, to the Market Place where you see a gold piece. GET
GOLD and go S, E, N, to Florassia's Plant shop. Say FLORASSIA HELLO,
and she asks if she can interest you in today's special offer. Say
FLORASSIA YES, and she tells you that Growth spells are reduced to
one gold piece each. BUY GROWTH SPELL and go S, E, N, N, to Mottinan
Bay, where you see a length of rope. GET ROPE and go S, S, E, to the
Cliff Top. The ground is soft here so PLANT ACORN and CAST GROWTH
SPELL. The acorn grows into a large tree. TIE ROPE TO TREE, and CLIMB
DOWN ROPE. Half way down the cliff face you see a Silver Falcon
Amulet, near a bird's nest. GET AMULET and continue D, to a secluded
beach. Go N, to the cave, OPEN DOORS and continue N, to another cave.
Loranin is here and he gives you all the help he can, a morningstar
and a growth spell.

Go W, W, W, through the tunnel to the exit. Here Loranin seals the
tunnel and tells you to say "equire" to the stableboy. Go W, and you
see a stableboy outside the stables. Say STABLEBOY EQUIRE, and he
recognises the password. He provides you with a horse, and you ride
for three hours along the long straight road. You arrive at a path
leading through a small shady forest, and dismount. The horse gallops
back to the stable.

Go N, N, N, to the town of Tresidan and E, to the Pawnbrokers. PAWN
SAPPHIRE, and the pawnbroker gives you 25 gold pieces. Go W, N, W, S,
to a Forge, where a sign says "Doubleswords only 20 gold pieces plus
another weapon. You have the morningstar and enough gold, so BUY
DOUBLESWORDS. Go W, N, W to a cottage, where you meet Santowa, a
neutral wizard. Say SANTOWA HELLO and he asks you if you would care
to buy one of his skill ringlets for only 5 gold pieces. BUY SKILL
RINGLET with your remaining gold pieces and go E, E, E, N, N, N, to
the road out of Tresidan. Here you are confronted by four bowmen.
Their leader demands that you get them the Mayoral Orb.

Go S, S, E, to the Mayor's home, there is a small oak sapling in
front of the house, so CAST GROWTH SPELL, and it grows into a large
tree. CLIMB TREE and you get through an open window into the Mayor's
bedroom, where you see the golden orb and a cut diamond. GET ORB and
GET DIAMOND, and go, D, W, N, N, back to the bowmen. GIVE ORB TO
BOWMEN, their leader takes it and they leave. Now you can continue
your journey.

Go N, E to a stable, where you see an ostler. Say OSTLER HELLO and he
says if you cannot afford the 100 pieces for a horse a diamond will
do. The diamond is worth much more than that, but you will not be
able to pawn it, as the pawnbrokers will have been notified that it
has been stolen, so GIVE DIAMOND TO OSTLER. He says "here's your
horse", and points to a healthy looking stallion. MOUNT HORSE and it
takes you across the river. However, the crafty ostler has trained it
well for once across, it throws you and gallops back to the stable.

Go W, N, into the forest and you see a dead forester. EXAMINE
FORESTER and you find a darksight spell.

CAST DARKSIGHT SPELL and you can now see in the dark. Go S, W, W, to the Malyt's cavern, the troll is asleep, for they sleep during the day. GET RUBY and go E, E, E, N, N, E, E, to a farmhouse. Say FARMER HELLO and he says that if you will get his stolen ruby back, he will give you his enchanted throwing knife. GIVE RUBY, and he gives you the knife, but warns that it will only work against people who mean to kill you. Go W, W, N, N, W, N, to the Mayor's house, where you see a fighter attacking the mayor. KILL FIGHTER and, to show his gratitude, the mayor gives you an emerald. Go S, E, N, N, N, to a road junction, where you are confronted by a thief. It is clear that he intends to kill and rob you, so THROW KNIFE AT THIEF. It kills him so continue E, N, to the Armourers. The Armourer says "You're a stranger here aren't you ... I wonder if you're the one who stole Loxinir, the ferryman's sapphire collection."

Go S, W, N, N, to Cottringham Bay and PULL ROPE. The bell summons the ferryman, he says "Trips to Senduarin cost 3 gold pieces or something of value." You have no gold left, and remembering what the armourer said, you dare not offer the stolen sapphire, so GIVE EMERALD. The ferryman takes it and ferries you across the Strait to Sutrinan. Go N, into the town where you are arrested by the town guards for stealing the orb and diamond from the mayor of Tresidan. You spend the night in gaol, but as the stolen items are not found in your possession, the following morning they throw you out of Sutrinan after confiscating all your possessions.

This is the end of Part 1. The passcode to part 2 is XAOR. (If you had not been carrying the silver falcon amulet, you would have got a false passcode ORLA.)

****

Ok you lot out there. Hands up anyone who's hiding a copy of Quill, GAC or PAW in a dusty drawer having decided it's too difficult to use. You? Right then, get it out and dust it off... I'm going to start from scratch and show you how to write an adventure using your utility. You probably won't make a million (if anyone does I'd be grateful for the inside knowledge) but you'll certainly be able to write a game fit for distribution amongst your friends and fellow readers!

Let's begin by looking at what an adventure is. From the player's point of view the computer simply takes a command typed at the keyboard, decides whether (unusually) it understands the command, and if so prints a message on the screen to tell the player what it has done.

From the writer's point of view things are a bit more complex! An adventure can be viewed as a database containing information about the playing area, rules of conduct for moving around, manipulating objects etc. and a set of messages which with the computer communicates with the player. The writer's task is to fill the database so that a playable adventure emerges, and bearing in mind that computers only ever do what they are told, the writer must insert every piece of information the computer needs to run the adventure.

When using a utility such as GAC, much of the structuring of the database is done for you. Some things are common to all adventures with only minor variations. Thus any adventure allows the player to move around the map to a greater or lesser degree, pick up and drop objects etc. If you were to write an adventure using Basic you would have to design routines to deal with these common actions. Utilities take the hassle of this away by having such routines built in and ready to use. With a creator all you normally need to do is define the objects in the game, insert the text of room descriptions and messages, type in the connections between varios rooms then write 'conditions' which will tell the computer how to deal with the various commands the player types in.

That's the programming side but what of plot and problems? Adventure creators DO NOT CREATE adventures!! The only adventure creator available is the human imagination. You don't even need to have access to a computer to be able to create an adventure. There's no reason why you couldn't create an adventure, write the details down, then pass them over to a programmer who would do the computer work. A more accurate description of adventure creator utilities would be adventure programming aids... and they are certainly that, but programming is the last process in adventure writing, not the first.

:::
FOR SALE
Spectrum 48K computer, hardly used, still in original packing.
Bargain £50 o.n.o.
Tel: 0785 42660 to check availability or write to:
John Barnsley, 32 Merrivale Road, Risingbrook, Stafford. ST17 9EB
:::

With this in mind I propose to spend some time over the next few issues showing how a game is built up, not merely from the programming point of view but also keeping plot and puzzle creation in mind. I will be using GAC as that seems to be the more popular utility, but any programming explanations will apply as far as possible to the Quill and PAW (even Basic if that's your bent). The work will be done on an Amstrad since it's got a disc drive and my Spectrum hasn't, but machine differences are slight and mainly irrelevant.

Over the months GACers will be able to type in a full listing of a crude, but working game, and if there's sufficient demand I'll also produce a similar listing for Quill and PAW. These will be available from Sandra undr a similar system as currently running for solutions as they will take up too much space in the mag.

Once the crude game is up and running I will be giving you homework to send in in the form of extra game features to be dreamed up and designed..... it's much better to work these things out for yourself than to be totally spoonfed.

During this time I will be available to sort out problems, common ones in the magazine and more specific ones by post (if SAE etc is sent!).

With your interest and co-operation we should be able to write a mega game over a variety of formats and utilities, perhaps to be sold later for Probe funds?

For the moment I want you to consider the following scenario and rough puzzles (old Contact readers will have seen this before but don't stop reading as we will be going far beyond the original plot.)

SCENARIO:

You have been captured (how?) by the local baron (who?) and slung into a cell in his castle (why?). Your friends (who?) are waiting in the forest (where?) and your task is to escape (how?) and rejoin your loyal band.

The questions in brackets are for you to think about and when you have any suggestions send them in to me at the address below. I'll sift through the mountains of suggestions which I'm sure to receive (!) and use what I consider to be the best ideas to build the game... so if you want me to use YOUR idea you'd better get writing!

Send your comments and ideas to;

        Pat Winstanley, 13 Hollington Way, Wigan, WN3 6LS

(...... and don't forget the SAE if you want a personal reply... also a note of your machine and utility and as much detail as possible of the problem if you need help.)

SANDRA'S CHATLINE

If you have any queries about your subscriptions or you fancy a chat then give me a ring on 0942 217044 between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. on a Saturday morning or 7 p.m and 9 p.m. on a Sunday evening.

I'm sorry but this is not a helpline. If you need help in an adventure then please ring one of our volunteers listed below.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

TELEPHONE HELPLINE

(Spectrum)
ALF BALDWIN Tel: 0452 500512 - Monday to Saturday - 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
MIKE WADE Tel: 0642 763793 - Monday to Friday - 6 p.m. to 7 p.m.
JACK HIGHAM Tel: 0925 819631 Fri, Sat, Sun, Mon. - 7 p.m. to 10 p.m.
WALTER POOLEY Tel: 051 933 1342 - calls at any reasonable time.
DOREEN BARDON Tel: 065 382 509 - calls at any reasonable time.

(BBC)
BARBARA BASSINGTHWAIGHTE Tel: 0935 26174-Mon to Fri- 10a.m. to 10p.m.

(Commodore)
MANDY RODRIGUES Tel: 0492 77305 - Mon. to Sun. up to 10.30 p.m.

(Spectrum and Amstrad)
GRAHAM WHEELER Tel: Bath 0225 26919 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. any day.
SUE BURKE Tel: 061 653 0005 - Monday to Sunday - 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

(Amstrad)
DOUG YOUNG Tel: 01 681 5068 - Evenings Mon to Fri anytime weekends.

JOAN PANCOTT Tel: 0305 784155 - Any day - Noon to 10 p.m.
Update of completed adventures: Dracula, Heavy on the Magik, Terrormolinos, The Sydney Affair, Dungeons, Amethysts, Alchemists 'n' Everythin', Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Zork 1 and The Case Of The Mixed-Up Shymer.

Please make sure you only ring at the times shown.

If you would like to volunteer for the telephone helpline then send in your name, telephone number, make of machine, and state the days and times when you would be available.

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HALL OF FAME

Thanks to the following readers for sending in contributions over the last month:

Alf Baldwin, Mark Butler, Graham Collier, Ron J. Handy, Alec Mackie, Dr. V. E. Montegriffo, Dr. W. D. Neithercut, Jim O'Keeffe, Joan Pancott, Neil Shipman and Robert Shirley.

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